

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 8309

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E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, NI, UX, XA

SUBJECT: PROPOSED VISIT BY VICE PRESIDENT

SUMMARY: VISIT TO AFRICA BY VICE PRESIDENT-DESIGNATE
ROCKEFELLER SHORTLY AFTER CONFIRMATION COULD BE DRAMATIC
MEANS OF REAFFIRMING USG INTEREST IN CONTINENT'S PROBLEMS.
END SUMMARY

1. AS REPORTED LAGOS 7597 AND 8012, FMG OFFICIALS HAVE
EXPRESSED HOPE THAT NEW US ADMINISTRATION WILL BE ABLE
DEVOTE GREATER ATTENTION TO AFRICAN PROBLEMS THAN THEY
HAVE PERCEIVED TO BE CASE IN RECENT YEARS. IN THIS
REGARD, PRESIDENT'S PLEDGE TO MEMBERS OF CONGRESSIONAL
BLACK CAUCUS OF INCREASED CONCERN FOR AFRICAN ISSUES WAS
PARTICULARLY WELCOME. PROBLEM REMAINS, HOWEVER, OF
TRANSLATING THIS PROMISE INTO CONCRETE ACTIONS. DESPITE
OUR BEST EFFORTS, FALL SESSION OF UNGA IS UNLIKELY FIND
US AS RESPONSIVE TO AFRICAN VIEWS AS OAU MEMBER STATES
MIGHT DESIRE, AND DECLINING AID LEVELS APPEAR TO RULE
OUT ANY DRAMATIC GESTURES IN ASSISTANCE FIELD BEYOND
ONGOING RELIEF OPERATIONS FOR SAHEL. VISIT BY PRESIDENT
OR SECRETARY, WHICH WOULD HAVE ENORMOUS IMPACT, SEEMS FROM
HERE DIFFICULT TO FORESEE BECAUSE OF CONFLICTING HEAVY
DEMANDS ON THEIR TIME.

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2. UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, NOMINATION OF GOVERNOR

ROCKEFELLER TO VICE PRESIDENCY MAY OFFER UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY TO DEMONSTRATE INCREASED USG INTEREST IN AFRICAN PROBLEMS. WERE VICE PRESIDENT-DESIGNATE TO SCHEDULE TOUR OF AFRICA FOR EARLY WEEKS OF HIS INCUMBENCY, SUCH ACTION COOULD BE PRESENTED AS CLEAR EVIDENCE OF PRIORITY BEING ACCORDED AFRICAN AFFAIRS BY NEW ADMINISTRATION AND OF BEGINNING FULFILLMENT OF SECRETARY'S PROMISE OF INCREASED ATTENTION.

3. WHILE OVERALL ITINERARY FOR SUCH TRIP AND THEMES TO BE STRESSED WOULD OF COURSE BE MATTER FOR WASHINGTON DECISION, NIGERIAN STOPOVER WOULD BE ESPECIALLY APPROPRIATE SINCE VICE PRESIDENT-DESIGNATE HEADED USG DELEGATION TO NIGERIAN INDEPENDENCE CELEBRATIONS IN OCTOBER 1960. IN ADDITION, NIGERIAN VISIT BEFORE END OF YEAR WOULD PROVIDE OCCASION FOR DISCUSSING WITH FMG AT HIGHEST LEVELS CONCEPT OF NEW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN US AND NIGERIA WHICH HAS BEEN UNDER DISCUSSION WITHIN USG OVER RECENT MONTHS. KNOWN TO AFRICANS IN HIS ROLES BOTH AS LEADING BUSINESSMAN AND AS GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL, VICE PRESIDENT-DESIGNATE APPEARS PARTICULARLY WELL-PLACED TO STRESS CONTRIBUTION WHICH AMERICAN PRIVATE SECTOR CAN MAKE TO NIGERIAN DEVELOPMENT AND TO EXPLORE WAYS IN WHICH USG CAN STIMULATE AND COORDINATE THIS EFFORT. FURTHER ELEMENT IN PROJECTED RELATIONSHIP COULD BE VISIT BY GOWON TO US, FOR WHICH VICE PRESIDENT COULD RENEW INVITATION OUTSTANDING SINCE EARLY 1970. WITH VISITS TO UK, USSR, AND PRC BEHIND HIM (LAST-NAMED BEGINS NEXT WEEK), GOWON SHOULD BE RECEPTIVE TO IDEA OF US VISIT AS PART OF POLICY OF BALANCE AMONG EXTERNAL POWERS.

4. IN SUM, VICE PRESIDENTIAL VISIT TO AFRICA AS ONE OF FIRST OFFICIAL ACTS FOLLOWING GOVERNOR ROCKEFELLER'S CONFIRMATION APPEARS PARTICULARLY ATTRACTIVE MEANS FOR GIVING IMMEDIATE SUBSTANCE TO PRESIDENTIAL PROMISE OF INCREASED USG ATTENTION TO CONTINENT'S PROBLEMS.
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